

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
BUREAU OF RECLAMATION**

**MID-PACIFIC REGION**

**SOUTH-CENTRAL CALIFORNIA AREA OFFICE  
FRESNO, CALIFORNIA**

**Draft FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

**ANNEXATION OF SUBORDINATE LANDS IN CHOWCHILLA WATER DISTRICT**

**Central Valley Project  
Sacramento, California**

**FONSI-07-44**

Recommended by:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Judi Tapia  
Natural Resource Specialist  
South Central California Area Office

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Concurred by:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Laura Myers  
Resource Management Division Chief  
South Central California Area Office

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Approved by:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Will Shipp  
Deputy Area Manager  
South Central California Area Office

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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## **FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

### **Annexation of Subordinate Lands in Chowchilla Water District**

In accordance with the National Environment Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended, the South-Central California Area Office of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation,) has determined that an environmental impact statement is not required for the approval of the inclusion of 3,393 acres of land into Chowchilla Water District's (CWD) water service contract service area. This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is supported by Reclamation's Environmental Assessment Number 07-44, *Annexation of Subordinate Lands in Chowchilla Water District*, dated May 2008, and is hereby incorporated by reference.

Reclamation will approve the annexation of 3,393.62 acres of land to be included in CWD's Central Valley Project (CVP) water delivery service area. This would allow the application of CVP water onto these parcels. CWD's Board of Directors has designated these landowners as "subordinate annexors." These "subordinate annexors" would be supplied only when surplus water from Reclamation contracts and existing CWD rights is available over and above the needs of "original landowners." ("Original landowners" are those landowners that were within CWD's CVP service area boundary prior to inclusions.)

#### **BACKGROUND**

The purpose of the annexations is to include the lands into CWD's CVP water service contract service area. These inclusions are needed to allow CWD to provide surface irrigation water for established crops on these lands at such time as water is available and to reduce groundwater overdraft. Since CWD spans from the trough of the San Joaquin Valley to the base of the Sierra Nevada foothills, the depth to groundwater varies substantially over the district from relatively shallow near the trough on the western end of CWD to several hundred feet near the eastern edge of the district. As the depth to groundwater increases, the cost of pumping groundwater increases. The low cost to pump groundwater on the western side of the district entices landowners in the region to rely on groundwater. This has two impacts to CWD: 1) it depletes the overall groundwater supplies underneath the district and 2) it reduces the market for surface water in wet years when full contract supplies are available. Providing water to the subordinate lands, which currently rely on groundwater will alleviate some of the groundwater pumping and also supply a market to CWD for their water supplies in wet years.

Reclamation's finding that implementation of the Proposed Action will result in no significant impact to the quality of the human environment is supported by the following findings:

#### **Findings**

##### **Water Resources**

The proposed annexation of lands would not result in changes to existing water resources. No additional water would be diverted from the San Joaquin River or Chowchilla River. The landowners of the annexed lands would be "subordinate annexors" as water would be supplied only when water surplus to Reclamation contracts and existing District rights are available over and above the needs of "original landowners."

Surplus CVP water is a short-term supply and is typically declared during times when it is not needed and lands are already saturated. The decision to utilize this surplus water for recharge or delivery to subordinate annexors would likely be based on hydrological conditions at the time it is

available. Groundwater pumping in the annexed area would likely decrease as a result of the Proposed Action. Since the groundwater overdraft in the basin is significant, the intermittent reduction of groundwater pumping by the landowners in the included 3,392 acres would be a small percentage of the 255,000 af of groundwater pumping in the sub-basin. The Proposed Action will have no impact on water resources

### **Land Use**

The majority of the land use in the project area is agricultural. No significant changes would occur to land uses as a result of the annexation of these lands. Construction activities for connecting the annexed lands to CWD's distribution system includes burying pipes along existing dirt roads and across already highly disturbed lands. The impact to land uses due to this construction is temporary. Impacts to land use are minor and temporary.

### **Biological Resources**

The proposed inclusion would not result in impacts to biological resources. Water would be conveyed in existing facilities with the exception of minor construction to connect the annexed lands into CWD's distribution system. This minor construction includes routing pipelines along existing dirt roads and across highly disturbed lands. This construction activity would be short term and would not result in any long-term noise or nuisance to biological resources. The CVP water would be delivered to existing agricultural and tilled lands.

### **Cultural Resources**

Including lands into CWD would not result in impacts to archeological or cultural resources. These lands are agricultural lands that have undergone cultivation and land disturbance for more than 20 years. The minor construction activities associated with connecting the annexed lands to CWD's distribution system consists of buried pipelines along existing dirt roads and across highly disturbed lands.

Reclamation is in the process of complying with Section 106 of the NHPA and will consult as appropriate.

### **Indian Trust Assets**

There are no tribes possessing legal property interests held in trust by the United States in the water involved with this action, nor is there such a property interest in the lands designated to receive the water proposed in this action.

There are no Indian trust assets (ITAs), Indian Reservations, or public domain allotments found within CWD. The Proposed Action would not effect or interfere with the observation of religious or other ceremonies associated with ITAs.

### **Socioeconomic Resources**

The proposed annexation would not result in decreasing CWD's ability to fulfill its CVP repayment contract requirements. The annexed landowners in this Proposed Action would be "subordinate annexors" as water would be supplied only when water surplus to Reclamation contracts and existing CWD rights is available over and above the needs of "original landowners." No increases or decreases of agricultural lands would occur as a result of the annexation of lands. Decisions by landowners to interrupt timing of necessary crop watering schedules to allow wells to replenish available water supplies and to preclude pumping of groundwater would likely be based on

hydrological and economical conditions unrelated to Reclamation's approval for the annexation of lands. The acceptance of surplus water at reduced rates by the "subordinate landowners" would not result in any significant increased or decreased economic benefits. This surplus water is an intermittent and temporary supply and is typically declared during times when it is not needed for crop production.

### **Environmental Justice**

The Proposed Action would not cause dislocation, changes in employment, or increase flood, drought, or disease. The Proposed Action would not disproportionately impact economically disadvantaged or minority populations. There would be no changes to existing conditions. The delivery of water at a reasonable price ensures low wage jobs are available. The unemployment rate within CWD's service area suggests that any actions that maintain seasonal jobs should be considered beneficial. Employment opportunities for low-income wage earners and minority population groups would be within historical conditions. Disadvantaged populations would not be subject to disproportionate impacts.

### **Cumulative Effects**

The Proposed Action was found to have no impact on biological resources, cultural resources, ITAs, and socioeconomics and therefore there is no contribution to cumulative impacts on these resources areas. Temporary construction impacts on land use will occur but due to their temporary nature they will not contribute to cumulative impacts. Water resources will have minor positive impacts due to groundwater pumping reductions however these reductions will be within the variability of historic groundwater pumping and are occurring in an overdrafted basin so there will be no cumulative effects to water resources. Slight beneficial impacts to environmental justice are also within the historical variations and would not contribute to cumulative impacts. Overall there will be no cumulative impacts caused by the Proposed Action.